

There's hue but no cry over multi-toned half dollars

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and paper money.

Q—Does deep toning on a Columbian Exposition half dollar of 1893 make the item more or less valuable? Also, what causes the color to develop?

H.J., Chicago

A—Most collectors shun silver coins with black or unsightly toning. But rarities that display attractive hues—such as a rainbow of russets, crimsons and blues on a commemorative half dollar—usually sell at premium

prices.

Silver coins tone naturally over the decades as the surface metal oxidizes and tarnishes. The chemical process quickens when coins are exposed to moisture, rubber or paper, among other things.

Also, some tricksters will create artificial toning to hide imperfections on a coin's surface. For example, a silver dollar might turn orange or purple if baked inside a potato covered with corn oil. Experts normally can distinguish between manufactured and natural coloring.

Q—What's the difference be-

tween coins marked "proof" and "proof-like"?

T.W., Skokie

A—"Proofs" are made with polished dies and slugs and struck at least twice to assure a mirrorlike surface and sharp details. Such coins are sold to collectors or presented to dignitaries; they are not used as pocket change.

"Prooflikes" are circulation-bound coins that look like proofs, usually because they were among the first pieces made with a new set of dies. Such keepsakes often command a premium on the hobby market.